

Questions About Nominations and Eligibility

What is a participating entity?

A participating entity may include any group, organization, regional planning agency, or government entity that participates in the development and implementation of a community's Strategic Plan.

What constitutes a local government?

A local government is any individual county, city, town, township, parish, village, or other general purpose political subdivision of a State or any combination thereof.

If an EZ includes geographic areas from more than one relevant local government, must all of them join in the nomination?

Yes. If a nominated area crosses the boundaries of State or local governments, then each State or local government must join in the nomination.

Can a portion of a census tract or portion of a block numbering area, which is equivalent to a census tract in rural locations, be included in a nominated area?

No. Census tracts and block numbering areas cannot be partially represented. However, Indian reservations may pose reservation boundaries instead of census tracts.

Can the same census tract be included in more than one nominated area?

No. Each nominated area must be an independent and unique area.

(Continued on next page)

THE APPLICATION PROCESS: BECOMING AN EZ

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATION: NOMINATION

To apply for EZ designation, an area must be nominated by a nominating entity: its State or local government, a tribal governing body, or a State-chartered economic development corporation (EDC). (If an EDC submits an application, it will be treated as a nomination by State and local governments.) The information requested in the *Rural Application Form* must be certified by the State and local governments. In the case of areas within Indian Nation reservations, the nominating entity should be the reservation governing body.

Although these entities must do the nominating, all parts of the community should participate in the application process by being involved in creating the community's Strategic Plan. Participants should be identified in all application materials. In areas where government staff is limited, one community participant may take the lead preparing the application. In larger areas, local governments may take the lead, bringing together the many diverse groups that need to be part of the process.

See the accompanying box for more information on nominations.

STEPS IN APPLYING

Step 1: Obtain Round II Application Materials

In addition to this *Guide*, these materials include:

Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rule—Rural Empowerment Zones Round II: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rural Application Form: Nomination for designation as a rural Empowerment Zone (Parts I-IV). The *Application Form* identifies and contains the eligibility information a community must submit to USDA for Round II designation.

To help you prepare your Strategic Plan, the following publications are available:

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities: Leads communities through the process of establishing a vision, evaluating problems and opportunities, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals and strategies.

A Guide to Implementation and Benchmarking: Helps rural communities turn their Strategic Plans into specific work programs and create performance measures to evaluate their progress.

Federal Programs Guide: Provides a list of Federal Government programs available to distressed communities. Applicants can use this *Guide* to identify current or prospective Federal Government programs that may be helpful to revitalize their neighborhood.

Internal Revenue Service Publication 954, Tax Incentives for Empowerment Zones and Other Distressed Communities: Summary of the tax incentives available to EZs and other communities in distress.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Preliminary Guidelines: Round II EZ/EC SSBG Grants for Empowerment Zones: See Eligible Uses of EZ/EC SSBG Funds (page 35).

What Works! in the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, Volume II: A compilation of successful projects from current EZs and ECs (includes contact names and telephone numbers).

For further information regarding Round II of the EZ/EC Initiative, or to order one of these publications, please call 1-800-851-3403.

Step 2: Submit a Notice of Intent To Participate

Part II of the *Rural Application Form* is the Notice of Intent To Participate. Refer to the *Rule* in the *Federal Register* to determine whether your nominated area is eligible for EZ designation. If you have determined that your area is eligible, submit the Notice of Intent To Participate to the appropriate address (given on the top of the form). Submission of this form ensures a place on our mailing list so we can provide you with updated information on

Does a nominated area have to be an existing State-designated enterprise zone?

No. However, if a State enterprise zone does participate, the State must still join in the nomination and provide appropriate support for the proposed Federal EZ activities.

How many nominations can be submitted by a nominating entity?

The nominating entity or entities may nominate any number of areas. However, no nominated area can contain a census tract that has been included in any other nominated area.

Can Round I ECs apply to become Round II EZs?

Yes, but they are still required to meet all the eligibility and nomination requirements, including the submission of a Strategic Plan.

Can EZs be established on Native American reservations?

Yes. Indian Nations would be eligible to be designated as EZs in Round II.

The Round II legislation allows up to one rural EZ to be designated in "emigration" areas. What does this mean?

One rural Zone will be designated in an area experiencing recent high population outmigration, whether or not it has high levels of poverty. Census tracts in counties that had population outmigration of 15 percent or higher between 1980 and 1994 are eligible for nomination as emigration areas. Although they are exempt from the poverty criteria, all other criteria—land area, population, and distress—still apply.

requirements. Submission of this Notice lets USDA know that a community is undertaking a strategic planning process for the purpose of applying for EZ status. This form is not sufficient for application. Failure to submit this form will not disqualify a community from consideration.

Rural applicants may submit the Notice of Intent To Participate form electronically using the online Notice of Intent To Participate available on the EZ/EC Web site (<http://www.ezec.gov/round2>). The form may also be faxed to 202-690-1395 or submitted either to any local USDA Rural Development Office or directly to USDA Rural Development, Office of Community Development, 300 Seventh Street SW., Suite 701, Washington, DC 20024. Questions should be directed to 1-800-851-3403.

Step 3: Attend A Regional Workshop

USDA has scheduled regional workshops to provide you with further information about applying for EZ designation. Although attendance is not mandatory, the workshops will provide useful information about how best to complete the application process.

The schedule of workshops is as follows:

April 17 Montgomery, AL
April 21 Greenville, MS
April 21 Stillwater, OK
April 23 Salina, KS
April 23 Pendleton, OR
April 23 Sioux Falls, SD
April 28 Rockford, IL
April 29 Bedford, NH
April 30 Lexington, KY
May 1 Bakersfield, CA
May 5 Durango, CO
May 7 Norfolk, VA
May 12 Amarillo, TX
May 13 Shreveport, LA

Step 4: Complete the *Rural Application Form*

The *Rural Application Form* contains the “Nomination for Designation as an Empowerment Zone” (Parts I–IV). Please complete these forms and obtain all required certifications.

Step 5: Develop Your Strategic Plan

By far the most important part of the application is your community’s Strategic Plan for revitalization. USDA has developed a *Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities* to assist you in developing your Strategic Plan. The *Guide* contains critical information regarding the type of plan you should submit. In addition, the elements to be included in the Strategic Plan are discussed in USDA’s *Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones*. Be certain that your Plan contains all of the elements required.

Step 6: Submit Your Application by the Deadline

All applications must be received by 5 p.m. EST on October 9, 1998.

Your final submission should include:

- Nomination Form (Parts I–IV) including required certifications—nomination for Federal EZ designation, eligibility information, certifications, and population data.
- A Strategic Plan.
- Maps. Attach a copy of the 1990 census map that shows the boundaries of the local government(s) listed in Part I: Nomination and the boundaries of the nominated area, including developable sites.

Make sure that all certifying signatures are original signatures.

The original application and two copies must be submitted. Each page of the submission, excluding the *Rural Application Form*, should be labeled with the name of the participating or nominating entity. In addition, the application should include the name and telephone number of a person who may be contacted to answer questions regarding your application.

The 5 new EZs will be designated by January 1, 1999.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

USDA will evaluate applications on the following factors:

- The potential effectiveness of the Strategic Plan and the extent to which it reflects the four key principles of the Community Empowerment Initiative: strategic vision for change, community-based partnerships, economic opportunity, and sustainable community development. Section 25.204 of the *Interim Rule for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities* describes these factors in detail.
- The strength of the assurances that the Strategic Plan will be implemented.
- The extent to which the Strategic Plan proposes activities that address the community's problems creatively and innovatively.
- The extent to which applicant areas consisting of more than one noncontiguous parcel are located close enough together to make up a cohesive community or regional entity.
- The degree of need for development within the nominated area.
- Diversity within and among the nominated areas.

Applicants can improve their chances of developing a successful application by ensuring that their Strategic Plans—and the processes by which they are prepared—reflect these criteria. The required organization for the Strategic Plan is explained in Section VII of the *Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones*. The format of the Strategic Plan is designed to highlight the topic areas that communities should give particular attention to in developing and presenting their Strategic Plans.



AFTER SELECTION

The following activities will follow your selection as an EZ:

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

Shortly after designation, rural EZs will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the appropriate State or tribal governing entity and USDA. This Memorandum outlines the partnership agreements between the two parties.

Note on EZ Social Services Block Grant Funds

The Clinton administration's fiscal year 1999 Budget, which was sent to Congress in early February, includes proposed funding for a second round of EZs. The Administration is seeking \$1.7 billion over the next 10 years to fund 20 new EZs. Fifteen of the new Zones will be urban, and five will carry rural designation. Under the President's proposal, the five rural EZs will each receive \$4 million a year for the 10-year period, totaling \$40 million for each Zone. Legislation that would enact the President's proposal was sent to Congress late in the first quarter of 1998, and the Administration is hopeful Congress will expeditiously approve funding for this proposal. For information pertaining to eligible uses of EZ SSBG funds, see Eligible Uses of EZ SSBG Funds.

LEARNING WHAT WORKS! PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The performance of EZs will be tracked to:

- Evaluate the progress of your Strategic Plan against your self-designed performance standards and make necessary mid-course corrections to help meet your goals.
- Monitor the implementation of your Plan and determine if the EZ designation should be continued.
- Identify problems so USDA and other Federal agencies can provide needed assistance.
- Measure the impact the EZ/EC Initiative has on your community so that we can continue learning from innovative community development efforts.

The performance of EZs will be tracked using two methods:

- EZ designees will be required to submit periodic reports to USDA's Office of Community Development (OCD). This activity will provide a progress report on the benchmarks established by your Strategic Plan. These periodic reports will also reflect any modifications to your Strategic Plan that you may have negotiated with USDA over the course of the implementation of the local

program, to take advantage of changing opportunities and circumstances.

- Using the originally approved Strategic Plan and the periodic benchmark reports to provide a baseline of information, OCD will commission periodic third-party evaluations of the program.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO EZs

Through the Community Empowerment Board (CEB), Federal agencies have promised dedicated resources for EZs within the following signature initiatives:

- Southwest Border Regional Initiative
- Delta Regional Initiative
- Rural Champion Communities
- National Centers of Excellence
- National Centers of Excellence: Tribal College Partnership
- Reinventing Government Initiative

SOUTHWEST BORDER REGIONAL INITIATIVE

In response to Vice President Gore's challenge to EZs and ECs asking that they adopt regional approaches to planning and problem solving, 19 EZs, ECs, and Champion Communities from the southwest border region formed the Southwest Border Regional Initiative.

Key Features

- The Initiative includes EZs, ECs, and Champion Communities from Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and the State of Washington (serving migrant workers).
- The goal is to foster sustainable approaches to rural development across the border region.
- The partnership has identified education, environment, health, infrastructure, trade, and welfare reforms as focal points.

DELTA REGIONAL INITIATIVE

A similar regional initiative is being started in the Lower Mississippi Delta. Modeled on the Southwest Border Regional Initiative, it includes EZs and ECs from 219 counties in 7 States. Delta Regional joins the Southern EZ/EC Forum and the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center in a cooperative agreement to develop a long-range Strategic Plan. Together, this organization will

implement the over 200 recommendations from the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission report.

Key Features

- The Initiative includes both rural and urban EZ/ECs from the States of Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.
- The planning and organizational capacity of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center is linked with the implementation capacity of EZs and ECs.
- It facilitates cross-community collaboration.
- Signing of the Memorandum of Agreement is targeted for spring 1998.

RURAL CHAMPION COMMUNITIES

USDA has broken barriers to ensure sustainable capacity building in rural communities, promote regional cooperation and partnering, and provide nondesignated applicant communities with basic technical assistance.

More than 180 rural communities organized and completed the strategic planning process as part of their application for Round I EZ/EC designations. To ensure that their important work produced continuing benefits to these communities, USDA designated them as “Champion Communities” and is providing continuing assistance to them.

Key Features

- USDA Rural Development has funded more than \$100 million in development projects in Champion Communities since 1995.
- Other CEB agencies have targeted funds and other initiatives to Champion Communities.
- USDA Rural Development has sponsored conferences to train community leaders and to promote networking among communities.
- USDA provides targeted technical assistance to Champion Communities and gives them preference points in project-funding decisions.

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Local capacity building and economic development sustainability is being enhanced through a 2-year partnership among four rural colleges and USDA. The four colleges assist EZ/EC communities with Strategic Plan implementation through training programs and other sources of expertise.

Key Features

- Each school received \$100,000 in seed money from the Fund for Rural America.
- Each school received a Peace Corps fellow from Illinois State University.
- Participating schools have formed a national network to share information and expertise with other isolated rural communities.
- The objective of this initiative is to build a permanent relationship between college and the community it serves. This program will continue the capacity building and build rural development capabilities for the communities.

The colleges participating in the National Centers of Excellence initiative are:

- Heritage College, Toppenish, Washington
- Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi
- Somerset Community College, Somerset, Kentucky
- University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE: TRIBAL COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

A related initiative helps tribal communities develop empowerment programs through the technical assistance of Tribal Colleges. With assistance from USDA, the colleges are developing programs of training and community service to address the critical needs of the communities they serve. The initiative responds to President Clinton's Executive Order 13021, which directed Federal departments and agencies to integrate Native American Tribal Colleges into their programs.

Key Features

- Each school received \$50,000 in seed money from USDA for first year operations.
- Colleges participate in a national network to share information and expertise.
- The objective of this initiative is to strengthen capacity building relationships between the communities and the Tribal Colleges.

Tribal Colleges participating in this initiative are:

- Cankdeska Cikana (Little Hoop) Community College, Fort Totten, North Dakota
- Crownpoint Institute of Technology, Crownpoint, New Mexico
- Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana
- Nebraska Indian Community College, Winnebago, Nebraska

REINVENTING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

This initiative, under the leadership of Vice President Gore, will renew the commitment of cooperation between the Federal, State, and local governments and the people they serve.

To accomplish this goal, USDA and the Community Empowerment Board (CEB) are committed to working with all communities undergoing the strategic planning process—even if they do not receive EZ designation. USDA and CEB will strive to overcome programmatic, regulatory, and statutory impediments to encourage more effective economic, human, physical, environmental, and community development activities.

The particular impediments that present major challenges under this initiative should be made clear to USDA and CEB in the Strategic Plan. In turn, USDA and CEB will focus its energies on overcoming those barriers. Assistance in identifying impediments is essential to this program, and should explain what you want us to examine in an addendum to your Strategic Plan.

You should not, however, base your entire Strategic Plan on receiving specific waivers or benefiting from particular changes to Federal statutes or regulations. Our ability to take action varies widely from program to program and in some cases may be constrained

by statutes. Nevertheless, we will make every effort to accommodate your needs and, where appropriate, we will work with you to seek statutory authority for broader flexibility of Federal programs. Your experience and cooperation are essential to reinventing the way we do business so that we can be responsive to your Strategic Plan.



ELIGIBLE USES OF EZ/EC SSBG FUNDS

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PRELIMINARY GUIDELINES: ROUND II EZ/EC SSBG GRANTS FOR EMPOWERMENT ZONES

Background

This document includes general guidance about allowed uses of Round II EZ/EC Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds that may be made available for Round II Empowerment Zones (EZs). It is based on the assumption that Round II EZ/EC SSBG funding is subject to the same statutory restrictions as the Round I EZ/EC SSBG grants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will issue further guidance regarding Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds soon after it is authorized to award the funds.

Awards to States

(a) HHS will award Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to each State that nominated a designated Round II EZ. HHS will award the funds for each Round II EZ to the State agency that typically receives Social Services Block Grants, unless the EZ Lead Entity(ies) and its (their) State requests HHS to award them to a different agency.

(b) The HHS Terms and Conditions of the Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds will direct the recipient State agency to provide the funds to the appropriate Round II EZ Lead Entity(ies) for activities specified in the EZ's Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan. It is expected that the EZs will revise their Strategic Plans and benchmark documents/implementation plans from time to time.

Allowed Uses of Round II EZ/EC SSBG Funds

(a) Round II EZs may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for a wide variety of programs, services, and activities directed at revitalizing distressed communities and promoting economic independence for residents. Allowed programs, services, and activities include, but are not limited to:

- Community and economic development programs and efforts to create employment opportunities.
- Job training and job readiness projects.

- Health programs such as public health education, primary healthcare, emergency medical services, alcohol and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, and mental health services.
- Human development services such as child, youth, and family development programs, services for the elderly, and childcare services.
- Education projects such as after-school activities, adult learning classes, and school-to-work projects.
- Transportation services.
- Environmental cleanup programs.
- Policing and criminal justice projects such as community policing efforts and youth gang prevention programs.
- Housing programs.
- Projects providing training and technical assistance to the EZ Lead Entity(ies), its (their) board and committee members, and other organizations.
- Projects to finance community-focused financial institutions for enhancing the availability of credit such as loan funds, revolving loan funds, and microenterprise loan funds as well as other activities for easing financial barriers faced by social services entities, housing organizations, and other organizations serving EZ residents.

(b) Round II EZs may use the Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for projects supported in part with other Federal, State, local, or private funds, and they may allocate a portion of the funds to the State grantee agency for its administrative and grant oversight costs. Round II EZs may not use the funds as the source of local matching funds required for other Federal grants.

(c) Round II EZs must ensure that each proposed use of Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds is directed at one or more of the EZ/EC SSBG statutory goals; included in the Strategic Plan; structured to benefit EZ residents; and in compliance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.

(d) EZ/EC SSBG Statutory Goals: The statutory goals for uses of EZ/EC SSBG funds are as follows:

- (1) Achieving and maintaining economic self-support for residents to help them develop and retain the ability to support themselves and their families economically.
- (2) Achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency for residents to enable them to become and remain able to care for themselves in daily activities and over the long term.

(3) Preventing neglect and abuse and preserving families; protecting children and adults who are unable to protect themselves from neglect, abuse, or exploitation; and preserving, rehabilitating, or reuniting families living in the designated neighborhoods.

(e) Strategic Plan: All programs, services, and activities financed in whole or in part with Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds must be included in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan. Each project description must indicate the EZ/EC SSBG statutory goal it is attempting to achieve and how it will benefit EZ residents.

(f) Resident Benefit: All programs, services, and activities financed in whole or in part with Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds must be structured to benefit EZ residents primarily; the programs, services, and activities may also benefit nonresidents.

(g) EZ/EC SSBG Statutory Program Options: To the extent consistent with the local strategic vision, localities may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to finance programs, services, and activities for addressing any of the following broad statute-based program options. EZs that use the funds for any of the program options will have more flexibility in using the funds. [See paragraph (h) below.] The EZs are not required to use the funds for the program options, and may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to finance programs, services, and activities addressing other issues. The program options are as follows:

(1) To provide residential or nonresidential drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs that offer comprehensive services for residents, particularly for pregnant women and mothers and their children.

(2) To support:

(A) Training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged adults and youths in construction, rehabilitation, or improvement of affordable housing, public infrastructure, and community facilities.

(B) Nonprofit organizations such as community colleges and junior colleges providing short-term training courses about entrepreneurship and self-employment for disadvantaged adults and youth, and other types of training that will promote individual self-sufficiency and the interests of the community.

- (3) To support projects designed to promote and protect the interests of children and families outside of school hours, including keeping schools open during evenings and weekends for mentoring and study.
- (4) To support:
- (A) Services designed to promote community and economic development and job support services such as skills training, job counseling, transportation services, housing counseling, financial management, and business counseling.
 - (B) Emergency and transitional housing and shelters for families and individuals.
 - (C) Programs that promote homeownership, education, and other routes to economic independence for families and individuals.
- (h) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is a statutory program option listed in paragraph (g) above, the EZ may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to implement that activity including to:
- (1) Purchase or improve land or facilities.
 - (2) Make cash payments to individuals for subsistence or room and board.
 - (3) Make wage payments to individuals as a social service.
 - (4) Make cash payments for medical care.
 - (5) Provide social services to institutionalized persons.
- (i) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is *not* a statutory program option listed in paragraph (g) above, the EZ may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for the following purposes as a component of that activity only after receiving approval from HHS:
- (1) Purchase or improve land or facilities.
 - (2) Make cash payments to individuals for subsistence or room and board.
 - (3) Make wage payments to individuals as a social service.
 - (4) Make cash payments for medical care.
 - (5) Provide social services to institutionalized persons.
- (j) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is not one of the program options listed in paragraph (g) above, the Plan must include a statement explaining why the locality chose that project.

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Rural Economic Development Resources

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AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS

Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rule—Rural Empowerment Zones Round II: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rural Application Guide: This *Guide* offers specific instructions on how rural communities should prepare their application for Empowerment Zone designation.

Rural Application Form: Nomination for designation as a rural Empowerment Zone (Parts I-IV). The *Application Form* identifies and contains the eligibility information a community must submit to USDA for Round II designation.

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities: Leads communities through the process of establishing a vision, evaluating problems and opportunities, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals and strategies.

A Guide to Implementation and Benchmarking: Helps rural communities turn their Strategic Plans into specific work programs and create performance measures to evaluate their progress.

Federal Programs Guide: Provides a list of Federal Government programs available to distressed communities. Applicants can use this *Guide* to identify current or prospective Federal Government programs that can be used to help revitalize their neighborhoods.

Internal Revenue Service Publication 954, Tax Incentives for Empowerment Zones and Other Distressed Communities: A guide to tax incentives available to designees of Round II.

What Works! in the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, Volume II: A compilation of successful projects from current Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (includes contact names and telephone numbers).

To request these publications, please call 1-800-851-3403.

OTHER RESOURCES

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

Two CD-ROMs that detail information on Federal procurements valued at more than \$25,000 for an entire fiscal year, the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* and the Census Bureau's *Federal Assistance Award Data Systems* are available. This information helps to identify who buys what, who gives grants and loans, and who gets Federal funding.

Program/Agency Contact:

Governmentwide Information Systems Division

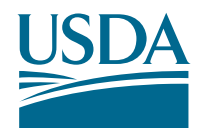
U.S. General Services Administration

Phone: 202-708-5126

Web site: <http://www.gsa.gov>

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Rural Development
Jill Long Thompson, Under Secretary